

April 30, 2021

Dear Members of the Health Finance and Policy Committee:

NAMI Minnesota would like to thank Rep. Winkler for including many important mental health priorities in HF 600. We are especially appreciative that the boards created in HF 600 were expanded to include additional representation from the mental health and substance use disorder community, placing limits on the potency of edible products, and funding a study on the impact of cannabis legalization on the mental health system. NAMI Minnesota is also very supportive of the efforts in HF 600 to expunge the criminal records of those charged with possessing a small amount of cannabis. The racial disparities in cannabis convictions are well-known and need to be addressed as soon as possible.

The potency of cannabis is increasing, and it is more available than ever. Neighboring states like South Dakota voted in support of cannabis legalization, while other states are seriously considering legalization. Even if HF 600 is not passed this year, more needs to be done to ensure that Minnesota youth are aware of the risks associated with cannabis use. Cannabis is not a benign substance and is risky for young people. NAMI Minnesota is particularly concerned about the connection between cannabis use and psychosis among young people, the impact of cannabis use on the developing adolescent brain, and memory and cognitive impairment. Despite the risks associated with young people using cannabis, the U.S. Surgeon General reported in 2019 that high school students' perception of the harm from regular cannabis use has been steadily declining over the last decade. Minnesota must immediately begin efforts to educate young people on the risks of regular cannabis use.

NAMI Minnesota appreciates the efforts being made by Rep. Winkler to work with the mental health community to mitigate the unintended consequences of cannabis legalization on mental illnesses. We look forward to additional collaboration on strengthening the warning labels on cannabis products to include potential health risks and additional investments in mental health services like the First Episode Psychosis program to meet the increasing need for mental health services that will come with cannabis legalization. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director

Sam Smith
Public Policy Coordinator